DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 109 912 FL 006 999

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TITLE Values and Desiderata of the Cultural Exchange Program with Romania.
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SPONS AGENCY Institute of International Studies (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
BUREAU NO BR-67-7901
PUB DATE 13 May 72
CONTRACT OEC-0-72-0918
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Conference on Romanian Language and Literature (Seattle, Washington, May 12-13, 1972); For related document, see FL 006 989

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS College Programs; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Exchange; Culture Contact; Curriculum Planning; Educational Programs; *Intercultural Programs; International Programs; *Program Administration; *Program Planning; *Romanian; Teacher Education; Teacher Placement; Teacher Selection
IDENTIFIERS NDEA Title VI; *Romania

ABSTRACT

Cultural exchange programs are beneficial to the participating students, professors, and countries, provided that the programs are administered in a way designed to achieve the objectives most usefully. In Romania, the question must be discussed of the role, for example, of American literature in the curricula of the universities, types of materials and courses, and the types of necessary support from the Romanian educational authorities and the American Embassy. In America the question of placement of Romanian scholars and methods of selection must be a matter of serious and continuing concern. In the past, while the programs have been valuable, much of the planning has been ad hoc. This paper tries to suggest specific areas where concerted effort, serious forethought, and long-range planning can add to the value of the programs. Among other suggestions are: a Xerox center for materials for Eastern Europe, increased book allowances, trained State Dept. personnel in charge, and ways of avoiding problems which have arisen in the past. (Author/AL)

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ED109912

University of Washington

Conference on

ROMANIAN LANGUAGE
AND
LITERATURE

May 12-13, 1972
Seattle, Washington

"Values and Desiderata of the Cultural Exchange Program"

by

Adrian Jaffe

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The Graduate School of the University of Washington

The Department of Slavic (and East European)
Languages and Literature

FL006999

I think that when we speak of exchange programs we sometimes forget that all exchanges, cultural or otherwise, involve and imply reciprocity. Although exchange programs are often closed in a rhetoric of altruism, they have in fact very definite and legitimate purposes. Without disputing that in a cosmic sense it may be more blessed to give than to receive it is useful to consider the possibility that it is often necessary to give in order to receive. There is no implication that the pragmatism inherent in this formulation is lacking in moral significance: very often the pragmatic and the moral coincide. There should thus be no embarrassment in asking what values there are for us in the cultural exchange program with Romania, nor in considering the ways in which these values might be better realized.

The exchange program with Romania affords us, as do exchange programs with other countries, an opportunity to reflect aspects of our culture and of our country. These can be of many kinds: our language, our literature, our technical knowledge in specific fields and the products of that technical knowledge. In a general way we make available our attitudes, our ways of doing things, our teaching approaches, our books, our journals, the thrust of our thinking, in the hope that the Romanians will not only find them of direct usefulness but in the confiction that we have, as a country and a culture, a way of doing things which is of worth. This is not meant in a propagandistic sense at all: it is not our job to trumpet our virtues, nor to indoctrinate any other

culture; that sort of cultural competition we can well leave to the French. It is our job I think, to make it possible for other countries to know us, and if by knowing us they find something they like, we have reason to be pleased.

This means that from our point of view an exchange program can only flourish when it is acceptable, and it cannot be acceptable by decree, only by circumstance acceptability means that there is a genuine need, recognized by the host country, which we can fill -- we cannot dictate what that need is nor what it ought to be. We must consequently ask (a) if we have the resources required to fill the need as stated and (b) if the need as stated is in fact a genuine rather than an ostensible need. If the answer to these questions is affirmative, we must ask whether the conditions exist which make the filling of the need possible.

For many years Romania has requested and received professors of American literature, with good academic credentials and American university experience, to teach courses in American literature, first at Bucharest alone, later at Cluj, Iasi, and Timisoara. They have in many cases discovered that (a) their students were not required to take their courses; (b) their students did not have the necessary preliminary background for the courses they had been asked to teach; (c) the library or supporting materials were scarce; (d) the interest in their field was small. In short, the expectations built into the requests could not be met, not because of failure but because they had not been realistically stated in the first place. In effect, the work in American literature was not taken seriously by the university in Romania in comparison with work

in cognate fields, such as British or French literature and provision therefore was not made for the fullest exploitation of the skills and talents which had been requested. It is certainly a matter for the Romanians to place things in orders of preference; the point is that when the actual, rather than the ostensible breadth of the teaching program in American literature, for example, has not been examined and understood, it is less than fully possible to afford to the Romanians what they wanted and what they needed.

Reports on the circumstances of American literature in Romania, for example, have been made year after year by those who participate in the programs, and yet each year it seems as if no history of any sort has been accumulated; the same lack of clarity, the same ambiguity, continue to exist. It seems to me that if we, by our own attitudes, do not demonstrate a great interest in what we are doing, we say something which we must expect to be overheard, that we do not think much of what we are doing.

I would therefore suggest a series of desiderata:

(1) American professors in literature should be persons ready and able to teach general courses in American culture and specific smaller courses in contemporary poets, theater, and writing. They should have sound training, but not necessarily specific academic immersion in limited areas, such as those of certain authors or periods. They should be prepared to teach flexibly and not feel the need for a rigid program or for work requiring access to many materials.

(2) All persons in the exchange program should be assured in advance that the materials they require will be available either through Romanian or American sources and their projects should encompass only those areas in which materials and facilities are in fact available.

(3) Access to needed bibliographical materials should be made possible by a program of xeroxing articles and books which are not otherwise available.

(4) Updated and accurate lists of holdings should be available in advance, as well as accurate descriptions of facilities which may be used.

(5) A firm place in the university system should be made for the American offerings, which should be on a par with cognate offerings from other nations.

(6) An adequate and full exchange system within Romania of American grantees should be established and put into regular operation, with the arrangements firm and the question of support fixed.

(7) Responsibility for the evaluation of programs and the development of future plans should rest with specific officials as an on-going function. They should initiate and carry on the necessary dialogue without which no program can operate with benefit, when they should take steps to help, rectify and modify programs as needs and circumstances change.

We must remember that cultural exchange programs are not exercises in the right thing to do nor matters to be taken care of pro formar as a symbol of cooperation: they are, in fact, at the heart of cooperation. The intangible benefits of exchange programs are greater in the long run

than any tangible ones which they may have in the short moment. In the last analysis, a genuine and valuable exchange is one which is the exchange of human concerns. This is why we should go about these programs with seriousness and care; this is why they should be given every opportunity to work. If, in order to make them work, we must take a hard look at what we are doing, it is only for the positive aim of seeing to it that they function. We must ask each other how each of us can help the other and we should identify in genuine terms the ways in which this can be accomplished. We have a lot to offer to each other and we should not offer less than we can merely out of negligence of detail and failure of adequate planning.